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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000872

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT CHEN AND THE DEEP GREEN: ALLIES OF CONVENIENCE

Classified By: AIT Acting Director David Keegan,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Deep Green pro-independence movement and President Chen each see the other as helpful to achieving their separate goals. Chen has gained much needed political support in return for lending his own support to Deep Green initiatives such as abolishing the National Unification Council/Guidelines (NUC/NUG) and drafting a new Taiwan constitution. This in turn has allowed him to redefine the political agenda as independence versus unification, putting the Kuomintang (KMT) and its Chairman Ma Ying-jeou on the defensive. For the Deep Green, although Chen may not accomplish very much beyond his decision that the NUC/NUG will "cease to function (apply)," his rhetorical support helps create a political atmosphere to push forward their long-term Taiwan independence agenda. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Chen has turned to the Deep Green to rebuild the political support base he lost after being blamed for his party's defeat in local elections last December. That is the only group he can still tap since moderate middle voters have moved to the opposition camp because of ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) scandals and poor government performance. While Chen's appeal to the fundamentalist base has increased his approval rating from about 15 to 25 percent, his rating may not rise much higher so long as he espouses the Deep Green line, which is unpopular outside his fundamentalist base. In addition to increasing his own popularity, Chen's aggressive approach and ceaseless criticisms of Chairman Ma have probably contributed to a small reduction in public support for the KMT, evident in recent polling.

¶3. (C) While Chen's rhetoric has taken on a Deep Green tone since January, his goals for the next two years may still be rather modest. For example, Chen has acknowledged that his proposal for a "new Taiwan constitution" can mean either an entirely new constitution, as advocated by independence fundamentalists, or revisions to the current constitution. However, Chen's officials are under instructions to avoid use of the term "constitutional revision," which could anger the Deep Green base, and are instead referring to "constitutional reengineering," Lo Chih-cheng, executive director of a

DPP-oriented think tank, explained to AIT. Chen can claim victory if he is able to achieve any constitutional revisions and even if he does not succeed, he can cite his bringing the issue to the table as significant.

¶4. (C) Examination Yuan President Yao Chia-wen recently told AIT that he sees significant differences between the Deep Green movement and Chen, contrasting the Deep Green's desire to expand public support for independence with Chen's quest for short-term political gain. Yao confided that Hand-in-Hand Alliance Acting Convener Huang Chao-tang, a leading figure in the Taiwan independence movement, was "very angry" when Chen announced his decision on NUC/NUG on February 27 because he had asked Chen to hold off until after September so that the Deep Green movement in Taiwan and worldwide could have time to mobilize public support for Chen's plan. Chen jumped the gun, Yao suggested, because the president wanted to help himself politically, was impatient, and was anxious to counter Kuomintang Chairman Ma Ying-jeou over Ma's statement that unification is the ultimate goal.

¶5. (C) Yao also stressed that Deep Green ideas for what most needs to be changed in the current constitution are quite different from those of President Chen. While Chen has proposed to add more provisions on human rights, Yao argued that human rights are already adequately covered in the constitution and there is no need for constitutional change in this area. Work on human rights should focus on legislation and implementation of law, not constitutional change, he maintained.

¶6. (C) Rather, Yao argued that constitutional change should focus on bringing the constitution into line with the decision that the NUG has ceased to apply. Specifically, Yao

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said, he plans to press for removal of the phrase "prior to reunification," which was added to make certain previous constitutional revisions applicable to the situation in Taiwan. Now, however, this reference to reunification is inconsistent with the NUG's "ceasing to apply," Yao argued. Yao said he would also like to change the constitutional term "original territory (guyou lingtu)" to "existing territory (xianyou lingtu)," but acknowledged this is less important.

¶7. (C) Yao noted that the Deep Green "Hand in Hand Alliance" has two main programs: laying groundwork for an entirely new constitution and changing names. "Name change" mostly means removing "China" from the names of Taiwan entities, Yao said, adding that name changes are increasingly important to eliminate confusion with PRC organizations. Yao said his current priorities are China Airlines and the China Petroleum Corporation (CPC), adding that his suggestion for CPC is "Central Petroleum Corporation," but that he has not yet come up with a suitable alternative name for China Airlines.

¶8. (C) Some Deep Green initiatives are currently impractical for political reasons, Yao acknowledged, and may take two or even twenty years to realize. However, he pointed out, by mobilizing its public, the Deep Green has scored an impressive series of victories over the years, for example, placing the name "Taiwan" on the cover of the "ROC" passport.

President Chen resisted this proposal for almost two years because the Foreign Ministry feared that other countries, including the U.S., Japan, and the PRC, might not accept the new passport, Yao noted. Under pressure and facing Deep Green plans for a large demonstration, the Foreign Ministry and Chen yielded. In the event, Yao said, the only country that even temporarily objected to the new passport was Ukraine. Despite earlier criticism, even the PRC accepted the new passport.

Comment

¶9. (C) Chen shares Deep Green objectives and has helped the

independence movement by recently suggesting, for example, that it is appropriate to include sensitive sovereignty issues in constitutional reform proposals. However, Chen has also been careful to point out the political realities that make sovereignty changes seemingly impossible now. In this way, he can gain credit with the Deep Green, further develop independence as an election issue to use against the KMT, and at the same time avoid being overly provocative to Washington or Beijing. Chen may also hope that his Deep Green stance will allow him to follow in the footsteps of Lee Teng-hui and remain an influential pan-Green leader after leaving office in 2008. In contrast to Chen, a clever politician who leaves himself room to maneuver, Deep Green leaders are idealists, pursuing a long-term strategy aimed at fundamentally changing the way Taiwan people think and building pressure for Taiwan independence from the bottom up. They hope the ongoing shift toward a Taiwan identity, distinct from China, will lead to the eventual success of the independence movement.

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